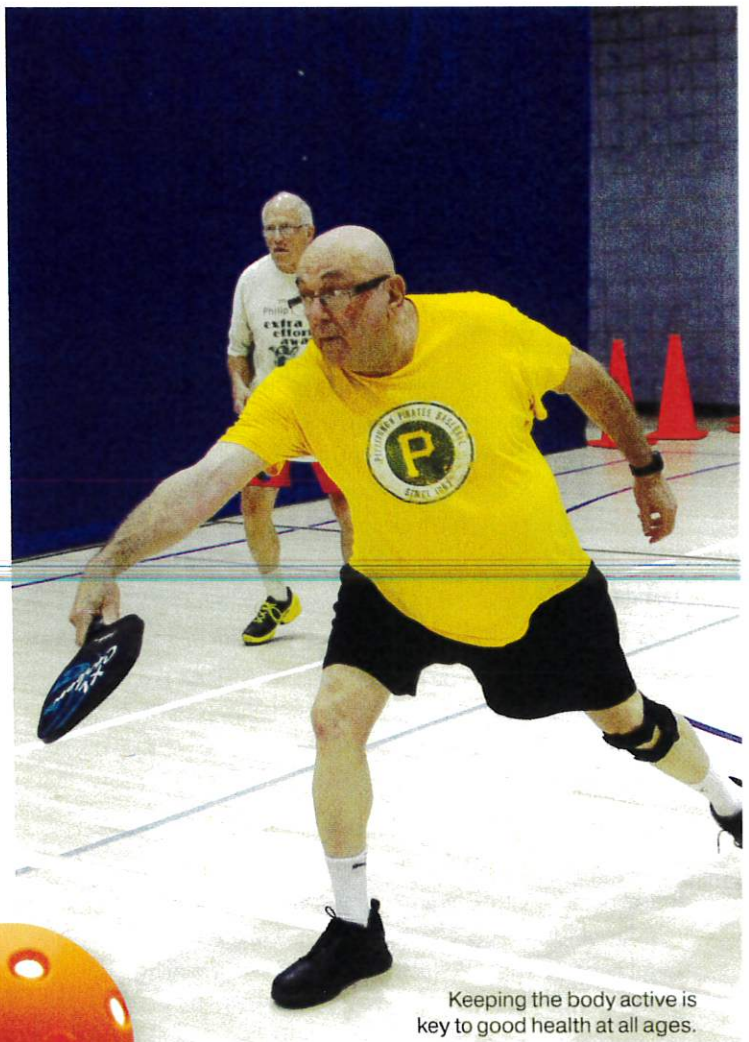
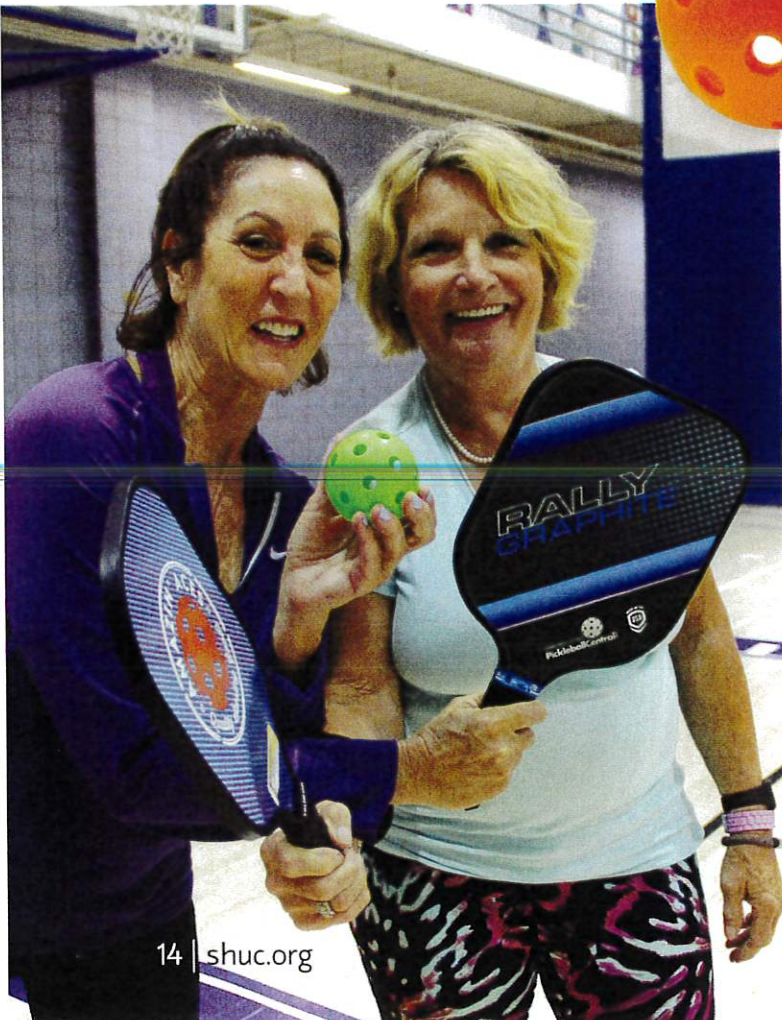


Living Well Through AgeWell at the JCC

By Melissa Eppihimer



Keeping the body active is key to good health at all ages.



ON MONDAY MORNINGS, MARSHA MULLEN CAN BE FOUND LEADING A LIIT CLASS IN THE WEIGHT ROOM OF THE SQUIRREL HILL JCC. An adaptation of the HIIT (High-Intensity Interval Training) workout, Mullen's LIIT modifies the intensity level but maintains the periodic bursts of activity. Upstairs in Levenson Hall, Holly Mihm is helping others improve their strength, endurance, and balance in a class called Boom using light weights and intentional movements. Both LIIT and Boom are offerings from AgeWell at the JCC, a senior center within the community center.

Founded more than four decades ago, Squirrel Hill's AgeWell at the JCC has developed into a senior center accredited by the National Institute of Senior Centers, part of the National Council on Aging. Senior Centers connect older adults with services and opportunities that can help them maintain their independence.

Pickleball is hit at AgeWell at the JCC.

"That's the goal of AgeWell, to keep people aging in place independently, and it definitely is working," said Mullen, the JCC of Pittsburgh's Program Coordinator for Healthy Aging.

The JCC is a hive of activity for AgeWell members. It's possible to stay busy throughout the day with a fitness class in the morning, lunch at the J Café (for a \$1.50 suggested donation), and then an art class in the afternoon. Membership is free for anyone living in Allegheny County who is 60 years of age or older. Registration requires only demonstrating proof of age and residency. There is no charge for classes.

Sharon Guberman of Braddock Hills prefers morning classes as a way to start her day. She's been amazed by how much she's enjoyed the AgeWell classes since joining two years ago after retiring. "The program has helped me immensely, and not just physically. It's a mind-body connection," she said.

60 *is not old.* *These people move!*

Many AgeWell classes inspire social engagement and intellectual exchanges between members. Current language classes include French, Spanish, and Yiddish, while Scrabble, Rummikub, Mah Jongg, chess, and bridge meetups promise friendly competition. There are also opportunities to explore and discuss Jewish history and religious and cultural traditions.

Some AgeWell programs address the needs of specific populations. The monthly Memory Café welcomes individuals



AgeWell's injury prevention clinics sustain members' physical health.

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Members of the choral group rehearse together.

living with cognitive changes and their care partners into a non-judgmental space to explore art, music, and movement together. In the fitness realm, PWR! Parkinson's Wellness and Recovery! classes feature exercises for individuals with Parkinson's disease or other neurocognitive disorders, and the Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program helps people with arthritis manage their pain, improve their mobility, and reduce joint stiffness. Those two fitness classes illustrate the evidence-based approach that underlies much of AgeWell's programming. Both were developed by nonprofit organizations and require instructor certification.

Finding instructors for AgeWell's fitness classes is a challenge that Mullen acknowledges. "I call them unicorns if they have time during the day but are certified to teach," Mullen said. The demand for classes is high, but there are not enough qualified instructors. Mullen is ready to help interested fitness instructors take the necessary steps to qualify. "I'm willing to work with people if they want to become certified," she said.

As a member, Guberman appreciates the quality of the instructors that lead the classes. She describes them as professional, knowledgeable, encouraging, and responsive to individual needs. Any class can be modified to match

the level of any participant, whether that is adding reps and weights to make it more challenging or incorporating a chair to lower the intensity of the workout.

Guberman also enjoys the community as a whole. "There's just a camaraderie," she said. "People are always joking around— it's a nice atmosphere with a friendly community. We share in our inability to keep up, but we're equally proud of ourselves when we succeed."

The positive outlook on senior living that AgeWell and its members operate with goes a long way towards combatting the stereotypes and biases that negatively affect older adults. "At the JCC, it's like the fountain of youth," Mullen said. "A lot of our members are older, but they're fit, and they move every day. It's because they are moving, they are stimulated intellectually, and they are socializing."

In response to demand, AgeWell is adding Zumba Gold classes this fall. Zumba puts dance at the heart of fitness, with the Gold classes tailored to the needs and abilities of older adults. The movements may be simpler, but the joy felt when moving to the music is the same.

Another by-popular-demand AgeWell offering is pickleball. The sport is in such demand that beginner lessons are



Lunch at the J Café offers good food, company, and sometimes entertainment.

offered every Tuesday, and open play is scheduled from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm every Friday in the Kaufmann Gym. As the sport grew in recent years, so did the number of pickleball-related injuries. In response, AgeWell has started offering pickleball injury prevention clinics that draw upon sports medicine expertise to help make sure that players' bodies are ready for the pickleball court.

While fun and fitness are pickleball's most notable draws, the sport can also improve balance. "Anyone after the age of 25 starts losing their balance if they are not working on it. Exercise is a great way to try to improve your balance," said Mullen.

Balance is also a key component of preventing falls, which are a known risk for older adults. To help its members minimize their risk, AgeWell recently offered a 10-week falls prevention workshop called Bingocize that combines exercise and education with the game Bingo. The June iteration filled up quickly, and a second run is planned for the fall. The workshops are funded through the Jewish Healthcare Foundation.

AgeWell is ready to help participants identify an activity that helps keep them healthy and happy. As Mullen puts it, "60 is not old—these people move!"



Are you 60 years of age or older?

Do you live in Allegheny County?

If the answer to both of these questions is yes, you are eligible to join AgeWell. Call or stop by the AgeWell office to make an appointment: Squirrel Hill JCC Room 201, 9 am-5 pm, Monday-Friday. 412-697-3514.